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**MARINE CORPS ENLISTMENT STANDARDS;
TRENDS AND IMPACT OF WAIVERS**

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**MARINE CORPS ENLISTMENT STANDARDS:
TRENDS AND IMPACT OF WAIVERS**

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FOREWORD

The research, sponsored by Marine Corps Headquarters (MPI-20), was performed under program element 63732M task area C0073-PN.01, work unit C0073-PN.01.01, Marine Corps Enlisted Waivers. This investigation evaluated Marine Corps accession policy for granting waivers to recruit applicants who fail to meet enlistment standards. The report describes trends in the rates of specific waiver types over several years, as well as the consequences of waiver policy on premature attrition.

Particular appreciation is expressed to the Defense Data Manpower Center and to MAJ. Larry Jurrica (MPI-20) for assistance and support in performing this investigation.

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SUMMARY

Problem

The Marine Corps sets physical, mental, and personal background qualifications for enlistment that are designed in part to maximize personnel effectiveness. Some of these standards are based on citizenship, educational level, and criminal records. However, when warranted, certain qualifications and standards for applicants may be waived.

Over the past 6 years there has been a steady increase in the number of waivers granted to Marine Corps accessions. The Marine Corps is appropriately concerned that this increase may adversely affect recruit quality, threaten unit morale, and increase premature separation from the Corps.

Objectives

The objectives of this effort were to (1) determine the source of the increase in granting of waivers over the past 6 years, and (2) assess the impact of this increase on premature separation.

Approach

Enlisted accessions data for six fiscal year cohorts, FY78 through FY83, were analyzed and trends in waiver rates were examined across the cohorts. Accession background data were analyzed to identify possible reasons for the trends. Finally, the impact of waiver rates on premature separation was examined.

Results

Between fiscal years 1978 and 1983, the proportion of waivers granted increased steadily from 42 to 63 percent. Analyses of specific types of waivers indicated that most of this increase is due in turn to a large increase in waivers for minor traffic violations. The premature separation rate for personnel with minor traffic violation waivers was slightly lower than that for all waivers combined and virtually the same as for personnel without waivers.

Conclusions

The increased incidence of waivers is primarily due to minor traffic violations, and there appears to be no concomitant increase in premature separation rates. However, this conclusion should not be interpreted as support for a less stringent waiver policy.

Recommendations

1. Based on the results obtained in this investigation, it is recommended that present waiver policy be maintained.
2. To project the consequences of modifications in waiver policy, it is recommended that more detailed information on the type of offense being waived (e.g., parking vs. speeding citation) should be made part of the accessions data base. This change would make it possible to develop a "severity of waiver" index to predict more precisely the future behaviors of those with different types of waivers. In addition, the data for applicants who were not granted waivers should be maintained and analyzed.

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INTRODUCTION

Problem and Background

The Marine Corps sets physical, mental, and personal background qualifications for enlistment that are designed in part to maximize personnel effectiveness. Some of these standards are based on citizenship, educational level, and criminal records. However, when warranted, certain qualifications and standards for applicants may be waived.

Over the past 6 years there has been a steady increase in the number of waivers granted to Marine Corps accessions. The Marine Corps is appropriately concerned that this increase may adversely affect recruit quality, threaten unit morale, and increase premature separation from the Corps.

Objectives

The objectives of this effort were to (1) determine the source of the increase in Marine Corps accessions who had enlistment qualifications waived over the past 6 years, and (2) assess the impact of this increase on premature separation.

APPROACH

Sample

Marine Corps non-prior-service enlisted accessions data for six fiscal year cohorts, FY78 through FY83, were obtained from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). Personnel, background, waiver, and attrition data were obtained for each enlistee.

Waiver Classifications

The enlistment qualifications that can be waived are classified into the following categories: (1) age, (2) number of dependents, (3) mental qualification (determined by Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) category), (4) physical qualification, (5) U.S. citizenship, (6) education, and (7) moral qualification. The "moral qualification" category includes both criminal and noncriminal offenses (see Table 1).

Separation Data

Reasons for premature separation are classified on the DMDC files into six major categories: (1) medical, (2) hardship, (3) death, (4) entry into officer programs, (5) failure to meet minimum behavioral or performance criteria, and (6) a category that includes "other" reasons such as pregnancy and erroneous enlistment. For purposes of this research, "adverse separation" was defined as failure to meet minimum behavioral or performance criteria (category 5), and erroneous enlistment, a subcategory of category 6. Adverse attrition in these categories was examined for the first year of enlistment only, to ensure that comparisons across year cohorts were meaningful.

Background Variables

In addition to the waiver and separation information, AFQT category, data on education level, age, sex, and race for each accession were taken from the DMDC file.

Table 1
Description of Moral Qualification Waivers

Type	Example	Criteria
1. Minor traffic violation	Improper parking, speeding, careless driving, failure to signal.	6 or more violations in lifetime.
2. Minor nontraffic violation	Loitering, fighting, drunk in public, disturbing peace.	1 or more ^a with civil restraint.
3. Misdemeanor	Unlawful entry, looting, drunk driving, leaving scene of an accident.	1 or more ^b with civil restraint.
4. Felony (adult or juvenile)	Robbery, murder, arson, aggravated assault.	1 or more. ^b
5. Drug or alcohol abuse	Alcohol use leading to loss of job, use of marijuana 10 times or more within last 90 days, narcotics possession conviction.	1 or more. ^b

^aIf seven or more, applicants in AFQT category IV or without high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) test equivalent are ineligible for waiver.

^bIf one or more offenses, applicants in AFQT category IV or lacking high school diploma or GED are ineligible for waiver.

Data Analysis

Trends in waiver rates were examined by computing the proportion of each type of waiver granted by fiscal year. Accession background data were analyzed to examine possible reasons for any trends in waiver rates over the 6-year period. The impact of waiver rates on premature separation was analyzed by computing the adverse attrition rates by waiver type and fiscal year.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Waiver Rates

As shown in Table 2, the proportion of all non-prior-service accessions granted waivers has steadily increased over the 6-year period being investigated. In FY78, 42 percent of all accessions had an enlistment qualification waived; by FY83, the proportion had reached 63 percent.

Table 2
Marine Corps Recruit Accessions Granted Enlistment Waivers

Fiscal Year	Waiver Granted		No Waiver Granted		Total Accessions
	N	%	N	%	
78	15,904	42	22,242	58	38,146
79	18,681	48	20,045	52	38,726
80	21,527	53	19,261	47	40,788
81	22,198	56	17,743	44	39,941
82	20,800	58	15,299	42	36,099
83	22,307	63	13,291	37	35,598

As shown in Table 3, the proportion of enlistees granted moral waivers increased from 35 to 58 percent during the 6-year period, while waivers for other reasons remained virtually constant. Consequently, the general increase in waiver rates during this period can be attributed to the moral qualification waivers.

Table 3
Marine Corps Recruit Accessions With Enlistment Standards Waived

Enlistment Standards	Percentage by Fiscal Year					
	78	79	80	81	82	83
Moral qualification	35	41	47	51	53	58
Mental qualification	4	5	3	2	3	2
Dependents	1	1	2	2	2	2
Physical qualification	-	-	-	-	-	-
Education	-	-	-	-	-	-
Alien	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. A dash represents less than 1 percent.

Table 4 presents the "moral qualification" waiver type further separated into its respective categories. The largest proportion of accessions were granted a waiver because they had accumulated more than five minor traffic violations. Specifically,

Table 4

Marine Corps Recruit Accessions With Moral Qualifications Waived

Moral Qualifications	Percentage by Fiscal Year					
	78	79	80	81	82	83
Minor traffic violation	24	29	36	40	39	39
Other minor violation	3	3	4	4	5	6
Misdemeanor	4	3	5	5	5	5
Felony	-	-	1	1	1	1
Preservice drug or alcohol abuse	5	6	1	-	1	6
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. A dash represents less than 1 percent.

applicants with six or more traffic tickets, including both moving and nonmoving violations, during their total driving history would require a waiver to enlist (see Table 1). There has been an increase from 1978-83 in the proportion of accessions granted this type of waiver. The proportion of accessions granted waivers in the other categories was relatively small and constant over the 6 years, with the exception of some variation in the proportion of accessions granted waivers for preservice drug and alcohol abuse. Consequently, the general increase in "moral" waivers may be attributed primarily to minor traffic offenses.

Reasons for the Increase in Minor Traffic Violation Waiver Rates

The data available for this research do not permit clear isolation of the basis for the increased proportion of traffic violation waivers. Some possibilities include increased law enforcement of parking regulations, computerized traffic violation records, and increased driving hazards.

Another factor involved in this increase may be related to Marine Corps policy, which permits recruiting station officials to grant waivers for minor offenses to personnel with both AFQT scores in categories I-III and high school education or General Education Development (GED) test equivalent. As noted previously, the percentage of Marine Corps accessions meeting both qualifications increased steadily between 1978 and 1983, from 52 percent to 88 percent. These increases in recruit quality, which in turn increase the numbers eligible for waivers, should be expected to lead to increases in the numbers of waivers granted.

Waiver Rates and Premature Separation

To determine the effects of the increase in waiver rates on premature separation, the first-year adverse attrition rates for the 1978 through 1982 cohorts were computed (see Table 5). The FY83 cohort was omitted from this analysis because the first-term attrition data were not yet available. These first-year adverse attrition rates are very similar for personnel both granted and not granted enlistment waivers.

Table 5

First-year Adverse Attrition Rates for Marine Corps Accessions

	Percentage by Fiscal Year Cohort				
	78	79	80	81	82
Waiver	14	13	13	16	17
No waiver	14	13	13	15	16

Adverse attrition rates are provided in Table 6 for each type of "moral qualification" waiver. The adverse attrition rates were lower for recruits with minor traffic violation waivers than for those with other waivers.

Table 6

First-year Adverse Attrition Rates and Type of Moral Waiver

Moral Waivers	Percentage by Fiscal Year Cohort				
	78	79	80	81	82
Minor traffic violations	12	12	12	15	17
Other minor violations	18	15	15	18	20
Misdemeanor	17	15	14	17	19
Felony (adult + juvenile)	20	14	15	19	22
Drug or alcohol abuse	13	14	15	19	18

CONCLUSIONS

Results of this research indicate that the increase in the Marine Corps waiver rates over the past 6 years can be explained by an increase in the proportion of applicants granted waivers for minor traffic violations. Although the present data do not permit unequivocal conclusions, this increase may be partly due to increased quality of Marine Corps accessions. Furthermore, the increase in waiver rates has had no apparent negative impact on adverse attrition rates.

It may be concluded that the present waiver policy has not increased adverse attrition. With the data available for this research, no conclusions can be reached concerning the consequences of modifications in waiver policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. From the results obtained with these cohorts it is recommended that present waiver policy be maintained.

2. To project the consequences of modifications in waiver policy, it is recommended that more detailed information on the type of offense being waived (e.g., parking vs. speeding citation) should be made part of the accessions data base. This change would make it possible to develop a "severity of waiver" index to predict more precisely the future behaviors of those with different types of waivers. In addition, the data for applicants who were not granted waivers should be maintained and analyzed.

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